

## Why are so many doctors unregistered?

### BMDC must be strengthened to ensure strict oversight

We are alarmed by the recent revelations from the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC) that painted a disturbing picture of the health sector in general, and the medical profession in particular. As per BMDC data, approximately 36,000 doctors are practicing without their registrations renewed. Moreover, an unspecified number of "fake doctors"—who either registered with falsified documents or have no registration at all—are plying their trade with the BMDC unable to identify or track them. All this amounts to a critical oversight failure that can lead to a lack of accountability for any malpractices committed by physicians.

The importance of registration cannot be overstated. Doctors hold the power of life and death in their hands, and without a strong regulatory framework to oversee their activities, we're putting patients at risk. While hospitals and clinics where they work also have the duty to enforce registration requirements, the responsibility falls primarily on BMDC. As the regulatory authority, BMDC is mandated to register anyone practicing medicine and dentistry and also suspend them in case of professional misconduct, negligence, etc. Currently, there are about 134,568 registered general doctors, 14,323 dentists, and 29,018 medical assistants. As well as registration, BMDC also handles complaints against doctors and is also responsible for the medical educational institutions.

Despite having such broad responsibilities, however, BMDC is struggling with limited operational capacity, mainly due to staff shortages and inadequate facilities. It is also constrained by inadequate office space, as it operates out of a small, shared building and reportedly does not even have a room spacious enough to conduct a full council meeting. At a press briefing on Thursday, the council's president highlighted these issues, adding that while the number of medical institutions and practitioners has risen manifold over the decades, there has been a considerable dip in quality, especially in private medical colleges. This makes it all the more important that doctors are subjected to rigorous eligibility tests before their registration or re-registration to ensure they meet the highest professional standards. Ensuring proper education for prospective doctors is also crucial.

For this, we need proper leadership by the health authorities, particularly the BMDC. We urge the government to strengthen this vital institution so that it can handle the growing demand for its regulatory role with the thoroughness that it requires. Stricter enforcement of registration renewals and a robust verification process are vital to prevent unfit and unregistered doctors from practicing. Additionally, we must address the crisis of substandard education in some private medical colleges so that only the most qualified candidates are able to enter the profession.

## Sundarbans must be protected at all costs

### Government should consider phasing out Rampal power plant

As experts repeatedly cautioned long before the Rampal power plant became partly operational, the project is already causing various environmental issues, harming the Pasur and Maidara rivers near the Sundarbans as well as the forest itself. According to a report by this daily, the first unit of the coal-fired plant began operating in late 2022 without an effluent treatment plant (ETP), and it has since been discharging untreated waste into the rivers. This not only violates a condition set by the Department of Environment (DoE) but is also seriously damaging to aquatic life, potentially making fish unsafe for consumption.

A report published by the Center for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS) in September revealed that wastewater from the plant is being discharged into the Maidara River—which converges with the Pasur—without proper treatment. As a result, mercury levels in the rivers have risen. CEGIS collected water samples from 14 locations near the plant on four occasions since February 2023, finding that mercury levels had exceeded the government set acceptable limit of 0.0001 mg/L, reaching 0.001 mg/L. Between February and April this year, CEGIS teams found that while civil works for the ETP were completed, the mechanical and instrumental components were still unfinished.

Mercury contamination poses serious risks to the ecosystem. Phytoplankton and zooplankton, the microscopic organisms essential to aquatic ecosystems, absorb mercury, which then accumulates in fish, reducing their ability to reproduce. Humans and other animals consuming such fish may face serious health risks, according to experts. Moreover, local villagers who bathe in the rivers or use their water for daily chores are exposed to harm. We may recall that, in 2017, Greenpeace released a study warning that the plant would emit enough mercury to make fish within approximately 70 square kilometres unsafe for consumption. All this underscores why building the plant near the Sundarbans was a terrible idea from the outset.

The CEGIS report highlights many other alarming issues. Interestingly, however, the deputy general manager of the plant claims that the ETP has been "fully operational" for some time. If that's the case, why is the environment around the plant still being damaged? This is a question the government must investigate urgently. Immediate steps must be taken to mitigate the environmental damage caused by the plant, while a long-term plan for its discontinuation should be considered to prevent lasting damage to the ecosystems of Sundarbans, which is invaluable to Bangladesh and its people.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY



**World War I ends**  
On this day in 1918, at 5am, the Allied powers and Germany signed an armistice document in the railway carriage of Ferdinand Foch, the commander of the Allied armies, and six hours later World War I came to an end.

# COP29 must set a new goal for climate finance and adaptation



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As the climate crisis transcends borders, the 29th edition of the annual UN Climate Change Conference, COP29, taking place in Baku, Azerbaijan this year, is gearing to welcome 127 countries to spearhead the next stage in global climate negotiations. With rising global temperatures and escalating weather events, the conference will prioritise securing climate finance, which is defined as mobilisation of public and private money into three focus groups—adaptation, mitigation, and loss and damage—as needed by vulnerable countries to cut greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and protect susceptible communities. A central focus will be on the submission of updated national climate action plans under the Paris Agreement, which the countries must present by early 2025.

These policies aim to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). COP29 will bring together leaders from governments, businesses, and civil society to collaborate on actionable solutions, with the potential to unlock significant investments and shape the future of global climate policy. Briefly, the agendas of COP29 are focused on adaptation and finance. Adaptation refers to adjustments in ecological,

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social or economic systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli and their effects, with steps and efforts aimed at building resilience against climate changes.

It is crucial to understand that there can be no adaptation of a "3 Degree World." With the current policies, Planet Earth is on track for a three degrees Celsius temperature rise above pre-industrial levels—an unprecedented increase. At this level, ecosystems and infrastructures will struggle to cope. The Equator centric regions are expected to experience much greater warming, potentially twice the global average. This will lead



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FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

to extreme heat-trapping, which will significantly increase mortality rates, making large parts of the tropics uninhabitable. As the risk of crossing irreversible climate tipping points grows, the consequences for both the environment and human populations might be devastating. However, a three-degree world is not inevitable; with decisive and swift action it can be prevented, and this is the fundamental goal behind COP29.

At COP28, substantial progress was made on climate finance—particularly with the establishment of the Loss

and Damage Fund. The aspiration was that affluent nations would conclusively fulfil their long-standing commitment to provide \$100 billion annually in climate finance, but the reality was far from reflective of said assertions. Bangladesh is looking to this summit with a sense of urgency, reflecting the country's deteriorating climate crisis. Despite some advances in addressing loss and damage, the \$100 billion target is still unmet. This is deeply concerning given the geo-environmental condition of Bangladesh, which is already suffering from rising sea levels and frequent floods.

In 2024, Bangladesh continues to struggle with intensifying impacts of climate change caused primarily by the activities of developed nations. As a low-lying delta nation, it is experiencing increased monsoon flooding and cyclonic activity. For Bangladesh, these recurring floods lead to not only climate-induced displacement but also long-term economic losses, as people lose livelihoods, homes, and access to clean water. Cyclone

primary concern is whether the newly proposed New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) will deliver the necessary financial resources to tackle its climate adaptation needs. The NCQG aims to supersede the \$100 billion pledge, but there is growing concern that the money will not arrive quickly or in sufficient capacities. For Bangladesh, the climate crisis is no longer a distant threat—it's a current reality.

While COP28 offered modest optimism with discussions about reforming global financial systems to attract private investment, Bangladesh remains wary of solutions that rely too heavily on private sector funding, which can be unpredictable and slow to mobilise. The country needs guaranteed and immediate funding for climate adaptation and loss recovery, rather than complex financial mechanisms that may only serve to delay the much-needed assistance.

A key issue that remains unresolved from COP28 to COP29 is whether emerging economies like China and oil-rich Gulf states should contribute to global climate financing. Bangladesh, alongside other vulnerable nations, strongly assert that the burden of financing should not fall solely on the shoulders of the affluent nations. With the growing climate impacts that affect every part of the globe, it is crucial that all major economies—regardless of their development status—participate in climate finance. At COP29, Bangladesh will push for this broader responsibility, arguing that no country is exempt from the global climate emergency. This also includes a dialogue on "just transition," which promotes a fair shift to low-carbon economies by prioritising workers' rights, social equity and community well-being, while minimising negative impacts.

As COP29 progresses, Bangladesh will be watching closely to see whether the international community can meet the urgency of its climate needs. The country's future depends on substantial financial commitments for climate adaptation as well as the ability to recover from climate-induced damage. For Bangladesh, COP29 is not just a diplomatic event—it's a moment of survival. The anticipation is that this time, the world will act with the speed and scale required to avert even greater climate devastation. COP29 will be a critical opportunity for the global communities to ramp up efforts to curb climate change, particularly through enhanced financial support and more ambitious national climate action plans.

# Decarbonising the RMG sector requires smart policies



RMG NOTES

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According to a report by the Apparel Impact Institute (AII), \$1 trillion is required globally to decarbonise garment supply chains, with a significant portion required for Bangladesh. The challenges are multifaceted, from a heavy reliance on fossil fuels to inefficiencies within factory operations. Addressing these issues requires both substantial funding and strategic planning. Bangladesh's current energy infrastructure heavily relies on fossil fuels, such as natural gas, oil and coal. This dependency not only increases carbon emissions but also strains the country's economy due to high import duties. Adding to the problem, the limited rooftop solar capacity of many factories restricts the use of renewable energy sources. As a result, Bangladesh requires significant investment to shift away from a fossil-fuel dependent grid and towards renewable energy sources.

Another key barrier to decarbonisation in our RMG sector is the low energy efficiency in factory operations, particularly with steam systems. While Bangladesh has made strides in building green factories, these initiatives have not adequately addressed energy efficiency issues, which persist in equipment such as compressors, air conditioners and generators. Many of these machines are outdated and inefficient, leading

to high energy consumption and increased fossil fuel reliance. Replacing these inefficient systems with energy-efficient alternatives could reduce the sector's overall energy demand and alleviate fossil fuel imports. However, this requires substantial investment.

Bangladesh has access to some funding facilities through organisations like the Infrastructure Development Company Limited (IDCOL) and the Bangladesh Bank. However, the use of these funds remains low due to complex accessibility requirements. High entry barriers, such as stringent eligibility criteria, deter many factories from taking advantage of these resources. Additionally, restrictions on foreign exchange loans by the Bangladesh Bank further complicate funding, particularly for renewable energy and energy efficiency projects. These restrictions, while meant to control foreign exchange outflows, ultimately hinder initiatives that could reduce fossil fuel dependence.

To address these challenges, Bangladesh has already secured a \$250 million allocation from the Green Climate Fund (GCF) to support renewable energy development, but much more is required to achieve substantial decarbonisation. Foreign direct investment (FDI) and funding from international development agencies can be pivotal in bridging

the financial gap. These funds should ideally be converted into low-interest loans in the Bangladeshi taka to ease currency exchange pressures on the economy. Establishing these as revolving funds, where funds are repaid and reused within the country, will minimise foreign exchange outflows and provide long-term financial support for decarbonisation projects. This structure would also alleviate concerns about currency fluctuations impacting loan repayment.

Global apparel brands, as key stakeholders in the supply chain, can play a significant role in financing supplier decarbonisation. Brands can directly contribute to the sustainability of the industry through revolving funds and can reduce the forex burden on Bangladesh by making financing more accessible to suppliers. However, to ensure that such funds are truly impactful, brands must recognise that their purchasing practices, pricing strategies and order visibility affect the suppliers' ability to invest in decarbonisation. Therefore, any funding initiative should also address these structural issues within the supply chain.

One effective way to boost the accessibility and affordability of funds is through derisking mechanisms. This approach makes the funds more attractive and affordable for local suppliers by reducing perceived risks, thereby encouraging greater participation. By derisking funds, the RMG sector can unlock more financing for renewable energy projects and energy efficiency upgrades.

According to the Fashion Producer Collective's white paper, alternative funding models that don't entirely rely on debt are critical for the sector's sustainability. This could include grants, equity investments or shared

savings agreements where brands and suppliers split the cost savings achieved through energy efficiency upgrades. Moving away from a debt-centric approach allows more factories to engage in decarbonisation efforts without exacerbating financial strain.

Programmes such as the Future Supplier Initiative by The Fashion Pact aim to support suppliers in their decarbonisation journey. However, these programmes may lack the customisation necessary for Bangladesh's unique context. A collaborative approach, where brands, funders and manufacturers co-create methodologies, ensures the efficient use of funds and tailoring of projects based on the actual needs of the RMG sector. This cooperation will foster better results and avoid potential misallocation of resources.

Beyond factory-level improvements, Bangladesh must upgrade its national grid to accommodate renewable energy inputs. This requires not only funding but also policy reforms that enable investments in renewable infrastructure. Enabling policies will attract private investments, expedite renewable energy adoption, and facilitate the gradual shift from fossil fuels to more sustainable energy sources. Decarbonising our RMG sector is a significant challenge. The industry must secure large-scale funding, with an emphasis on availability, accessibility and affordability. By facilitating access to foreign and local funds, derisking investments, and promoting collaborative funding models, the sector can make meaningful strides towards sustainability. However, for these initiatives to succeed, brands, manufacturers and financial institutions must work together to create a supportive ecosystem.